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Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, Emory University School of Medicine & Marcus Autism Center helping DECAL train Infant-Toddler Specialists and Inclusion Coordinators

Effort Aimed at Early Detection, Assessment and Intervention of Children with Autism and Other Learning Disorders

ATLANTA, Ga., (August 5, 2013) – Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, Emory University School of Medicine and the Marcus Autism Center will be helping Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) train Infant and Toddler Specialists and Inclusion Coordinators on the early detection, assessment and intervention of children with autism and other learning disorders. The collaborative partnership has created a 12 month training curriculum on autism and related disorders including topics related to early detection, red flags for autism, developmental perspectives and early intervention and inclusion.

“This is a unique opportunity to help teachers working with our youngest learners throughout Georgia in urban, suburban and rural childcare settings who serve families with diversity in race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic levels,” said DECAL Commissioner Bobby Cagle. “This project will have a significant impact on the knowledge and coaching of the provider participants, the caregiver/teachers with whom they work and most importantly the children and families in their care.” Cagle said intervention has the greatest impact on autism if it begins before age 3, but the average age of diagnosis now ranges between 4 ½ and 5 ½ years of age. DECAL licenses and regulates the child care industry in Georgia which consists of over 6,000 providers with capacity to serve approximately 375,000 children.

“We are proud to be involved in this partnership,” said Don Mueller, Executive Director of Marcus Autism Center. “This program will enable Marcus Autism Center to work with DECAL to provide community support and training to enable earlier detection and intervention for children at risk for autism and related disorders. It will help build upon the community based infrastructure to impact more children and families in community settings. With an estimated 26,000 children in Georgia with autism spectrum disorders, it is critical that we form public-private partnerships to reach these vulnerable children.”

Kickoff meetings will be held in August and September, featuring a group lecture introducing the neuroscience of autism and the current state of early detection, assessment and intervention. The lectures will include video examples of early intervention and inclusion of children with autism. On-site and online training will continue over the next 12 months.

“We are excited about the potential of this partnership,” said Commissioner Cagle. “Emory University School of Medicine is ranked among the nation's finest institutions for education, biomedical research, and patient care. The Marcus Autism Center is the largest center for clinical care of children and adolescents with ASD in the country, providing comprehensive as well as problem-focused evaluations, and a wide range of treatments. The parent organization for the clinical practice at Marcus is Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta (CHOA), which consists of three pediatric hospitals, Marcus, 17 neighborhood clinics, and two large primary care centers.”

About Bright from the Start

Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning is responsible for meeting the child care and early education needs of Georgia’s children and their families. It administers the nationally recognized Georgia’s Pre-K Program, licenses child care centers and home-based child care, administers Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program, federal nutrition programs, and manages voluntary quality enhancement programs.

The department also houses the Head Start State Collaboration Office, distributes federal funding to enhance the quality and availability of child care, and works collaboratively with Georgia child care resource and referral agencies and organizations throughout the state to enhance early care and education. For more information, go to www.dec.al.ga.gov.